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Discourse Historical Approach towards ‘Killing Hunger with Entertainment’: A Street Art

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes a picture using Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach (2009). Visual discourse depicts object(s) that generate discourses in a precise and meaningful way. The production of artistic visual discourse is influenced by the sociopolitical circumstances. The piece of street art presents an isolated hungry Brazilian child. The sociopolitical events working in the background of this painting give greater meanings to it. The contrast in this picture is shown in terms of the wealthy West whose focus is on the entertainment and a poor country Brazil. Thus, this painting presents exploitation and exercise of power at individual, social and global level. The in-depth analysis of the picture reveals at micro level the elements composing the image. The four layered analysis helps relate the micro level details to link them step wise with the sociopolitical environments.

Keywords: street art, FIFA World Cup 2014, visual social semiotics discourse, historical discourse approach

Introduction

This study is about an image that is taken (Reuben, 2016) from a street painting presenting a caricature of a starving Brazilian child who is given a football to eat at the table. The empty plate is not as much shocking as the presence of football. The caption says that you cannot kill hunger with entertainment. Hunger and poverty have been the topic of visual presentation but this specific image shows a shocking contrast by placing a football on the plate.

The only human figure is of a starved child a victim of malnutrition with no clothes on his weak body. The street painting raises questions on the preference of entertainment over food which is the basic human need. In many ways, the Maslow’s hierarchy (1943) is mocked over this image. Sarcastically, the child is given a football to eat as a meal. We can see a brand-new looking football in an orange colored plate. Not surprisingly, everything else looks shabby except the football. This is indeed a shocking image. This reminds us of Charlie Chaplain’s silent movie in which the poor character has to eat a shoe.

The child's mouth is wide open with a large tear rolling down on his cheeks reveals increasing poverty in FIFA 2014 World cup hosting nation – Brazil. Setting aside the poor economic condition of the people, huge expenditures made to make this even a success. Since this picture is a recent example of the real environment it can be applied both ways as sites of memory and places which remind us of the past which in this case is recent event of 2014 FIFA football world cup.

When it was announced in 2007 that FIFA world cup would be hosted in Brazil in 2014, the locals were very happy about the possible prospects of income that would be generated through tourism. But it left the country baffled (Marpurgo, 2015). Huge sums were spent on security and maintenance of buildings and stadiums. Eventually, there was a double-digit inflation which hit the poor people massively. Unfortunately, the people could not seek any benefit from out of this event (Marpurgo, 2015).

The piece of street art in the form of a picture selected for this study is a shocking representation and it invites visual discourse analysts to decipher its explicit and implicit meanings. Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) along with tools of visual social semiotics were applied to explore visual information, frame, modality and salience zone, emotions of the central human figure through gaze, angle of perception & expressions, and sociopolitical background of the image. The image emphasizes significance of street art as opposed to the mass media projection of entertainment and presents the dichotomy of the poor and the rich. It also highlights the apparent preference of entertainment over food in the context of FIFA world cup football 2014. The following questions were addressed to explore this image from different vantage points.

- What effects does the visual context play in terms of the central human figure in the image?
- What is the significance of the caption regarding to the selected image?
- How does the image reconstruct a counter discourse about the mainstream media's projection of the socio political and historical event of FIFA World cup?

Literature Review

Visual Social Semiotics provides a theoretical frame work and it also presents as image as not just a part of isolated creative activity but also a result of social processes. The use of sign to construct the life of a community can be included in social semiotics (Lekme, 1990: 183) as cited in (Harrison, 2003). If the child in the picture looks directly without a smile on his face then it forces the viewers to see what his demand is. In this particular case it is the extreme hunger mocked by the presence of football. A picture can be observed through many perspectives; whether the figure makes an obtuse angle, there is a group of children or just one child, the image has a human figure gazing or not, image act is a demand or offer, how close the viewers feel themselves with the image, how the perspective angles in the image are presented, how horizontal and vertical angles affect the viewers minds, and how the choice of other semiotics would have affected the image in present picture (Harrison, 2003).

The compositional meta-functions such as representational and interpersonal relate to each other to make a meaningful whole. So, they should be divided and analyzed separately to get

meaning out of it. Harrison (2003) mentions four aspects such as 1) information value that provides the importance of any element of the picture according to its location, 2) salience zone, which provide information according to the fore-grounded and back-grounded parts of the picture or image, framing which gives information of the parts as compared to the whole, and modality which can be seen in images in the form of color saturation, color differentiation, brightness and detail making the image real, abstract, sensory or technical.

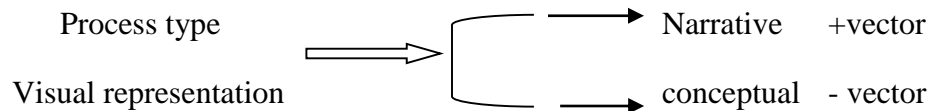


Figure.2 Two main types of process in visual representations (based on Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006 [1996]: 59).

This figure shows the main difference between the conceptual vectors is that the figure in the image makes an imaginary eye contact with the camera whereas the two people looking at each other have their own relation of looking. When narrative vector has something to pose at the conceptual vector imagines an audience.

Visual images must be analyzed along with cultural norms and perceptual qualities because they are more communicative across cultural codes than any single language (Aiello, 2006: 90). All visual texts are capable of performing special social actions and developing social semiotic representations. In the visual signification process the notion “resource” instead of “code” accounts for the imbalance of power which has two ends “representation (or encoding) and interpretation (or decoding)” (Aiello, 2006: 90). Social semiotics which is the study of signs and signification in a society has three main meta-functions; representation, interaction or orientation, and composition or organization all of which help to deconstruct an image (Iedema, 2001) as cited in (Aiello, 2006).

DHA explores the use of language beyond the sentence level while including in it the visual and sound as essential in meaning making. Hence sentence structures and material institutions are seen with mutual relationship with discourse (Wodak, 2015). The concepts such as critique, power and ideology are common in all models of CDA and in DHA while DHA adheres to socio-philosophical orientation of Critical Theory (Wodak, 2009).

Languages along with other semiotic practices are used to maintain domination by people of power. The initial steps using this model were based on utterances in anti-Semitic discourse for the analysis of prejudiced utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). Recent trends include the exclusion of out-group within a society through reconstructing the past events. Its central tenet is the analysis of textual and contextual levels. The context in DHA is based on historical knowledge. Four layers of DHA include 1) the linguistic co text, 2) the inter-textual and inter-discursive level, 3) the extra linguistic level and 4) the sociopolitical and historic level (Wodak & Meyers, 2009).

The Data

The data is in the form of a visual art. It is a picture taken of a painting. This adds frame within a frame. The picture is taken from a blog. As it a street art the artist is anonymous. The placement of elements of the image on the left/right, center/ margin or upper/lower side tells much about the signification to its information value. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1998) left and right placement creates structures such as the element placed at left are “given” and the elements placed at right are “new” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) as cited in (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 148). The “given” means that the reader or viewer is aware of the left side of the picture which is common-sensical or self-evident whereas, the “new” means that the right side is problematic and contestable. The elements placed on the top are ideal and those placed and the bottoms are real (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 148).

Framing is a technique for connecting or disconnecting the elements of a visual image. Disconnection can be done through observing empty spaces between elements and also through contrasts of color and forms. Saliency means that some elements are made to appear more eye-catching than others through difference in size and contrasts of colors. Modality shows that an image can be made to appear more real, surreal, fantastic, or ghostly which can affect differently on our sensory modality (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 151). When people from inside the picture look directly at the viewers and make contact, they make a relation with the imaginary audience and they are called as demand pictures. Facial expressions further reveal about the kind of demand the central figure is making with the audience (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out at four stages. At the first stage, the central human figure was analyzed according to the visual co text, and the objects around him were discussed in detail. At the second stage, inter-textual and inter discursive level the picture was divided into two frames and analyzed separately in terms of binaries. At the third stage, extra-linguistic level the image was understood with the caption because it was in the form of words. At the fourth stage, sociopolitical and historic level the image is discussed in terms of wider context which is the FIFA football world cup hosted by Brazil in 2014.

Findings

The child

This visual image contains a figure of a child who is from Brazil. This is evident from the caption as well but here the features, color and the texture of hair of the child reveal his nationality. The child is hungry. Had it been an old man or any young man instead of the child the responsibility of feeding that person would not have been on the society but on that individual to feed himself. So a child is appropriate figure to arouse the responsibility of state.

The body of the child is bare without a shirt and it is showing his body suffering from malnutrition. This shows that the child may never ever have had meals to eat to his fill. If the child had been wearing anything like a shirt or even a torn vest the weak body's bones would not be showing the way they do now.

The face of the child is full of intense emotions shown from wisely opened mouth, frowned eyes, and tense expressions. The innocent child's face is devoid of symmetry, smile and peace. His childhood is ruined by deprivation and unequal status which feed him with grudges and emotions of hatred and spoil his time of innocence with the memories of loss. If at all he survives he will have with him the insecurity of food and negative thinking forever.

Only one large tear in his right eye adds to the miserable poor ill fed body of the child that is so deprived of the basic nutrients that it cannot produce tears in abundance. Crying with wide open mouth and having only one tear in the eye is not a normal situation. It might be because the child had been crying for so long that his eyes cannot produce more tears.

The face of the child is tilted towards his right side. It shows that the child cannot hold his head straight. It must be because his body is too weak to hold his head straight. If that is so then for how long can the wealthy west's head can remain straight after seeing the child's plight. The child cannot even keep balanced his facial expressions the way he cannot balance his head over his weak body. He is too weak and emotional to keep his expressions balanced. The extreme dichotomy is also to be found in the wealthy west's persuasion for entertainment and in the paradoxical situation of the poor staring children of Brazil.

If the right-handed people tilt their heads towards right side in showing extreme emotions it also shows that they are thinking negative or having pessimistic thinking. This shows that the child is deeply sad. The child's face is tilted and his face makes an obtuse angle. His face in this image act is demanding food. As this is a caricature of a Brazilian boy the eyes are not making a visible contact with the imaginary audience. The use of a caricature enables the artist to put extra lines on the face of the child to put more emphasis on its poverty ridden weak body suffering from malnutrition.

The table

Many ways the table represents the western life style. The child is kept isolated on the table. The image portrays the child in isolation, which triggers multilayered interpretation. The angle, the fork and knife make with the child's hand is the right angle. This means protest. The child's figure symbolizes the protest against too much emphasis on entertainment instead of providing the poor with food. Since the size of the fork and knife and the size of the hands are smaller than the head there is least chance of revolt and protest at macro level. The bigger head means more focus is on the child's emotional expressions and hunger.

The child is innocent. To feed him is the responsibility of the state and society. This child's requirements are basic food, clothes and shelter. Instead of bread he is given a football to play with. Toys and playing games must have been the child's higher needs. So, playing with the child's feelings is a crime the responsibility of which is on those who serve him football instead of bread.

The presence of table apparently seems useless. If there was food instead of the table the child would not have been so sad. But the table with all its protocols mocks the human plight in a westernized way. The child could eat bread while sitting on pavement but he is given a football to eat in a beautiful orange plate.

The football

The pretty shiny neat colored probably unused football is presented on the table to the child to eat. The audience like the child expects food on the table. The placement of football shows a stark gap of understanding between basic human needs and what they call entertainment. Or perhaps the people have been so cruel that this display to them might be another form of entertainment. Football is a symbol of entertainment. Even when the caption is to be removed, the image itself conveys the meaning of football as it is associated with the world cup that was hosted by Brazil. It is because of the child's Brazilian features and texture and color of hair.

Binarism

Table 1 showing the verbal representation of the left and right side of figure 1. The left side illustrates the “given” which means that the elements of this side of the picture as shown in figure 1 b are known to the viewers. This side shows dull earth colors. The absence of saturated colors also highlights the absence of satiated stomach. The child is located in left side with all his poverty ridden and emotional expressions. This side has no spring flowers in abundance. So, this side shows the poverty and hunger. The presentation of an isolated figure of the child is also dismal picture. Without clothes and having nothing to eat but the football puts a shocking contrast to the viewers.

Table 1. Binarism in Figure 1 A and Figure 1 B

Sr. no.	The left side (given) fig 1B	The right side (new) fig 1A
1	Light dull earth colors	Deep horizon rainbow colors
2	Hazy environment presenting acute poverty	Football presenting well fed people
3	Barrenness dull colors	Spring flowers
4	Suffering human figure	Pretty shiny materials
5	The poor side	The rich side
6	Hunger	Entertainment

The right side or the “new” shows that there is something problematic placed on it. The presence of football on the beautiful orange plate is surely shocking and problematic. This side as shown in the figure 1 A is full of saturated colors. These colors are extremely different from the other side as they have bright horizon hues. The spring is also there to add to the colors of life.

Both sides are not complementary instead they are poles apart. The saturation of color is more in the new side. The football is new and the starving child is given. Moreover, the face of the child is upwards and the football is downwards. This shows that the football is ironically placed at

the bottom because the upper side represents the ideal and the lower side presents the real. Here football is ironically real. In fact, the football is real because that is the way popular media portrays it. The child is not unreal but he is made to look so.

The caption

The caption with this image states that you cannot kill hunger with entertainment. Here the choice of the word “killing” for hunger is very significant. Hunger is to be satiated or tamed but the question that how it can be killed is very significant. Here kill is a deliberate choice. It indirectly puts satire on the ignorant people who are involved in entertainment that they can kill someone with their negligence. Hunger is another important aspect. Hunger doesn’t mean missing one or two meals or having no meals for the whole day, instead it is a situation which puts a human being to think whether (s)he may ever be able to eat to their fill or if the next meal will come or not. Here the hunger means the hungry people. Hence killing hunger means killing the hungry people with entertainment. This killing may be at several levels. First entertainment is a kind of mockery on the face of the hungry individuals. Second the people are killed metaphorically and then physical death takes place. The wealthy people are killing the poor with their neglect, mockery, heartlessness and cruelty and finally they are killed economically. In killing the hunger or the hungry people the killing process doesn’t stop at once. Since every action has a reaction the killer kills his own conscience.

Sociopolitical history

Brazilian authorities spent 13 billion US dollars to host the FIFA world cup including two billion for security as well (Boadle, 2014) as cited in (Marpurgo, 2015). Even the promised jobs were declined to the local people and the large sums invested on the stadiums were wasted as they were left useless because of cheap materials even after using for the first four times. There has been popular discontent among the local people against Brazil’s hosting the world cup in 2014 (Marpurgo, 2015).

Conclusion

An image can generate a counter discourse against the meta-discourses that is usually perpetuated by the mass media. The image portrays the dark side of FIFA -2014. The techniques of visual information enabled the researchers to analyze the difference between the right new side and the left given side of the selected image. The gaze of the child demands attention from the world. This kind of street art stands as a counter narrative against the grand narrative. The division between the rich and the poor is presented symbolically through giving certain places to the child and the football. The image highlights the preferences of entertainment over poverty. The image can be divided vertically into equal parts representing unequal recourses, status and the dichotomy between the poor people’s struggle for food and the rich people’s preference for entertainment. There were several angles in the image which show imbalance, intense emotions and even protest. All the elements of the picture reinforce suffering of the people for the sake of entertainment.

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Appendix



Figure1

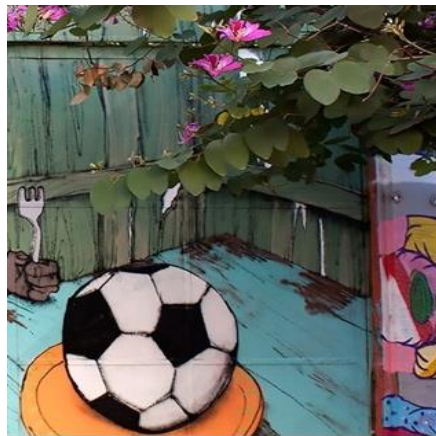


Figure 1 A

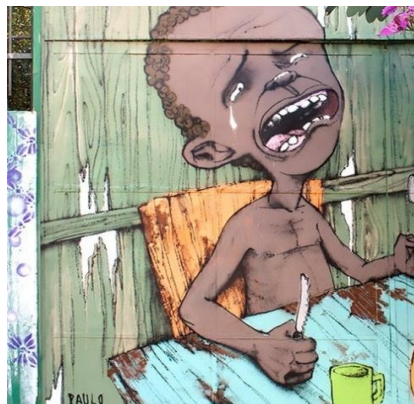


Figure 1B

